

Tourism microentrepreneurship: State of the art and research agenda

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Abstract:

Microentrepreneurship has always been an important driving force of the tourism industry. However, until recently, this sector was mostly invisible and understudied. Microentrepreneurs are now becoming influential stakeholders due to new information technologies that make their offerings easily accessible to a broader clientele and render their economic activity more transparent and taxable. There is a growing consensus that tourism microentrepreneurs can make destinations more competitive and equitable. Accordingly, there has been a surge of scholarship on tourism microentrepreneurship to inform strategies and policies to fuel microentrepreneurial development and its integration with the formal tourism sector. The purpose of this conceptual article is threefold: first, to discuss the definition of tourism microentrepreneurship and commonly used theoretical conceptualizations, as well as the evolution of research on tourism microentrepreneurship; second, to identify research gaps in the existing literature and propose avenues for future research; third, to serve as an introduction to a Special Section on Tourism Microentrepreneurship. In addition, we offer a set of practical recommendations for destination managers and supporting organizations to develop and nurture networks of microentrepreneurs, and to identify suitable and rewarding microentrepreneurial opportunities in the tourism business ecosystem.

Keywords: microentrepreneurship | livelihoods | technology | destination competitiveness | destination stewardship

Article:

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TOURISM MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP: STATE OF THE ART AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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Microentrepreneurship has always been an important driving force of the tourism industry. However, until recently, this sector was mostly invisible and understudied. Microentrepreneurs are now becoming influential stakeholders due to new information technologies that make their offerings easily accessible to a broader clientele and render their economic activity more transparent and taxable. There is a growing consensus that tourism microentrepreneurs can make destinations more competitive and equitable. Accordingly, there has been a surge of scholarship on tourism microentrepreneurship to inform strategies and policies to fuel microentrepreneurial development and its integration with the formal tourism sector. The purpose of this conceptual article is threefold: first, to discuss the definition of tourism microentrepreneurship and commonly used theoretical conceptualizations, as well as the evolution of research on tourism microentrepreneurship; second, to identify research gaps in the existing literature and propose avenues for future research; third, to serve as an introduction to a Special Section on Tourism Microentrepreneurship. In addition, we offer a set of practical recommendations for destination managers and supporting organizations to develop and nurture networks of microentrepreneurs, and to identify suitable and rewarding microentrepreneurial opportunities in the tourism business ecosystem.

Key words: Microentrepreneurship; Livelihoods; Technology; Destination competitiveness; Destination stewardship

Introduction

Most tourists seek genuine experiences in authentic destination communities (Buffa, 2015; Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). However, historically only the most

adventurous tourists were eager to venture from established tourist corridors and connect directly with host communities (Cohen, 1972). Most were content to remain in comfortable, convenient, and affordable tourist bubbles. They frequently settled

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for pseudoevents designed by a tourism industry focused on maximizing tourist expenditure. During the last few decades, however, advances in global mobility and information technologies have gradually given shape to a new tourism subculture in which tourists attempt to circumvent traditional tourism gatekeepers (Mackelworth & Carić, 2010) and obtain services and experiences directly from host community members (i.e., tourism microentrepreneurs). Tourism products offered by these microentrepreneurs are unique, capture the interest of discerning tourists, and provide a competitive advantage to tourism destinations (Duxbury & Richards, 2019).

Although research on tourism businesses is not new, a focus on very small-scale tourism entrepreneurs (i.e., microentrepreneurs), as a unit of study has only emerged in the past several years. Tourism microentrepreneurs are defined as individuals who launch or add value to existing businesses employing no more than five employees and providing tourism experiences, food, lodging, or transportation, to support their livelihood and desired lifestyles (Ferreira et al., 2018). Previous research has addressed small-scale tourism enterprises under various terminologies, including small firms (Horobin & Long, 1996; Thomas, 2000), small- and medium-sized enterprises (Jaafar et al., 2011), family firms (Hankinson, 1989), craft tourism (Rodenburg, 1980), and lifestyle entrepreneurship (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Peters et al., 2009), but comprehensive research in this area has been scarce. Yet tourism microentrepreneurs have become essential to the tourism system over the past 40 years. As international tourism expanded in the second half of the 20th century, attention grew around possible economic benefits for countries, regions, and communities. Simultaneously, the global shift toward a service-based economy resulted in an interest in the expansion of tourism livelihoods, particularly for unskilled or semiskilled laborers. However, these tourism workers were often viewed negatively, even being considered uneducated, unproductive, and unmotivated (Pizam, 1982). Despite acknowledging that these very small firms were frequently owned, managed, and operated by the same individual, scholars were reluctant to award them entrepreneurial status. Cohen (1983), for example, referred to outside investors as “international

entrepreneurs,” but resident business owners simply as “locals” in his research in Thailand in the early 1980s.

During the following two decades, infrequent case studies of small tourism entrepreneurs were the norm (Cohen, 1983; Hankinson, 1989; Horobin & Long, 1996; Lardiés, 1999), but systematic attention to the topic was limited. This gap in the literature was identified in the late 1980s (Shaw & Williams, 1988; Williams et al., 1989), but an uptick in research dedicated to the topic still did not occur for nearly 20 years. Ateljevic and Li (2009) found that only 2% of articles in tourism journals published over the previous 20 years were related to entrepreneurship. Over the years, the few studies that emerged on tourism microentrepreneurs (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Dewhurst & Horobin, 1998; Horobin & Long, 1996; Karides, 2005; Kensbock & Jennings, 2011; Peters & Schuckert, 2014) made clear that existing research on entrepreneurship, particularly about social and psychological traits, did not translate well to the context of tourism “micro-firms” (Horobin & Long, 1996). While more recent studies are dedicated to the topic (Alford & Jones, 2020; Ditta-Apichai et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2018, 2020; Hingtgen et al., 2015; Kelliher et al., 2018; LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, & Wallace, 2016; LaPan, Morias, Wallace, & Barbieri, 2016; Mohammad, 2021; Morais et al., 2017, 2018; Ngo-song & Kimbu, 2018; Yachin & Ioannides, 2020), research in this area is still just emerging. Therefore, this conceptual article provides an overview of the state of tourism microentrepreneurship research, provides an analysis of current literature, and offers suggestions for a future research agenda.

An Examination of the Literature

Models of Tourism Microentrepreneurship

While much of the research within entrepreneurship tends to focus on single individuals, Ateljevic and Li (2009) found that, within tourism, entrepreneurship models tend to be more complex. These authors argued that collective or communitarian forms of tourism microentrepreneurship have emerged in response to intense competition between destinations. These collaborative models of entrepreneurship are often facilitated by government and

nongovernmental organizations and can be effective in equipping microentrepreneurs with training, social support, and microcredit. Research shows that individuals who participate in communitarian microentrepreneurship are often better equipped to benefit from tourism than their solitary counterparts (LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, & Wallace, 2016). Communities with high levels of communitarian microentrepreneurship are also insulated from some of the negative effects of tourism and benefits are shared more equitably among the community to address local needs (Andrade Romo & Ochoa Velásquez, 2017). Despite early tourism microentrepreneurship research suggesting that “the tourism industry often does not enable its unskilled and semi-skilled employees to self-actualize themselves” (Pizam, 1982, p. 7), more recent research has shown that collaborative tourism models do allow individuals a better chance of achieving these higher-level outcomes.

Tourism microenterprises are usually owned and operated by a single individual (Franck, 2012; KC et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019), although a community-based or communitarian approach is also emerging in some regions (Henama, 2018; KC, 2021; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017; LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, & Wallace, 2016; Manyara & Jones, 2007; Morais et al., 2015). Furthermore, the rapid growth and adoption of technology and online platform-led microentrepreneurship (e.g., Airbnb) has resulted in a different approach rooted in disruptive entrepreneurship and the sharing economy (Henama, 2018; Sigala & Dolnicar, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). Platform-mediated tourism microentrepreneurship complicates the scope of community-based tourism, particularly with regard to defining and delimiting the boundaries of microentrepreneurship (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2020). Hence, we should acknowledge that microentrepreneurship is a rather fluid and overlapping concept that lends itself to be studied from different angles and approaches.

In the communitarian approach, a group of microentrepreneurs, usually from the same community, collaborate in a business venture to fulfill individual needs and enhance community well-being (KC, 2021; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017; LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, & Wallace, 2016). Often, communitarian microentrepreneurship is facilitated by the government or NGOs (KC, 2021; Morais et al., 2015) and is frequently favored due to ease of establishment,

low financial investment, and widespread acceptance among community members. Tourism microentrepreneurship is well-documented to offer abundant benefits, but also raises challenges that demand further investigation (KC, 2021; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017; LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, & Wallace, 2016; Manyara & Jones, 2007; Zhang et al., 2019).

Engaging in microentrepreneurship is no longer a distant concept for most individuals who can benefit from the ubiquity and popularity of web platforms that have helped to overcome retail monopolies. Tourism microentrepreneurship generally has low barriers to entry, given that the range of products and services offered usually do not require a high level of financial investment or advanced skills (e.g., sharing space and lifestyle with guests). Thus, tourism microentrepreneurship is expected to continue to grow, supplying a range of diverse tourism products complementary to that of the formal tourism industry. Considering its increasing stake in the tourism industry as well as the potential to positively contribute to all three pillars of sustainable tourism (i.e., economic, sociocultural, and environmental), timely research on the diverse aspects of tourism microentrepreneurship will be crucial.

Current tourism microentrepreneurs are often supported by information and communication technologies (ICT) that democratize access to generating and disseminating information about destinations. ICTs have eroded some infomediaries' monopolies that previously directed market interest to their chosen destinations and businesses (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Online travel agencies (e.g., Expedia) challenged traditional distribution models and allowed tourists to shop for deals on some aspects of their vacations and to be less structured about other aspects. Crowdsourcing traveler platforms like TripAdvisor allowed tourists to learn about other travelers' experiences, and internet blogs allowed tourists to learn about the way destination communities wanted to portray themselves to visitors (Wang & Morais, 2014). In turn, these developments gave rise to web-based platforms where microentrepreneurs from destination communities marketed tourism services directly to potential tourists (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2015; Payton et al., 2015). Some of these web-based platforms (e.g., Airbnb, Uber) attracted investment capital very rapidly and expanded into

destinations with a maverick-like attitude that challenged the status quo of formal sector stakeholders. Destination governments filed lawsuits and scrambled to develop new policies regulating the gig economy to control its impact on destinations, and to ensure that this burgeoning economic activity was taxed and therefore contributed to the local governance system (Martineau, 2019). In sum, although informal businesses have been allowed to glean the scraps of the formal tourism system for a very long time, during the last two decades tourism microentrepreneurs have gained prominence as a stakeholder group because of their association with high-profile tech companies worth billions of dollars, their visibility to tourists, and the tax revenues they generate for destination governments.

Tourism microentrepreneurship has historically occurred at the margins of destination systems. Meanwhile, microentrepreneurship and its economic impact was generally perceived to be insignificant compared to the economic impact generated by formal sectors of the tourism industry. Therefore, it is not surprising that this population is understudied and that practitioners are largely uninformed and unprepared to fuel microentrepreneurial development in tourism destinations. Moreover, most destinations continue to lack processes to integrate these informal businesses with formal sector components of the industry.

Understanding the Motivations of Tourism Microentrepreneurs

Until recently, tourism development practitioners and engaged academics relied on the general entrepreneurship literature (Carland & Carland, 1997) to inform their work with tourism entrepreneurs, but tourism scholars have noted that many aspects of entrepreneurship theory are not readily applicable to small and micro-sized tourism entrepreneurs (Hallak et al., 2011). Researchers have noted that small tourism entrepreneurs are driven strongly by non-economic motives, and they often prefer to contain the expansion of their businesses rather than pursuing unbridled growth (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cunha et al., 2011; Getz & Carlsen, 2005; Peters & Schuckert, 2014). Research suggests that many tourism microentrepreneurs are motivated to earn income only to the extent of optimizing their

family's well-being (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cunha et al., 2011). These findings are substantiated by Peters and Schuckert (2014), who reported that "small business entrepreneurs' quality of life considerations play an important role when planning the future of their firm" (p. 731). Furthermore, microentrepreneurs, especially women, are often much less tolerant of risk than suggested by mainstream (i.e., white, Western) views of entrepreneurship (Moodie, 2013). Rather than embodying the stereotypical maverick lone wolf entrepreneur (Longenecker et al., 1988), evidence suggests that tourism microentrepreneurs are often communitarian, serving as bridges between the origin tourist markets and the pleasure periphery where they opt to live, fostering innovation in tourism planning for the success of local partners (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). They do not necessarily seek to expand beyond the categorization of microentrepreneur to reach full-fledged entrepreneur status or what Filion (2011) defined as "an actor who *innovates* by *recognizing opportunities*; he or she makes moderately *risky* decisions that leads into *actions* requiring the efficient *use of resources* and contributing an *added value*" (p. 47).

Microentrepreneurs are mostly outside systems of power and often become dissatisfied with how their region and their people are represented to others through the media, tourism promotions, and even organized tours (Nazariadli et al., 2019). Therefore, much like other subaltern people (Spivak, 1988), they are highly motivated by the opportunity to speak for themselves about important aspects of their identity because they feel that the public holds incorrect stereotypes about them. Wang and Morais (2014) explained that tourism microentrepreneurship creates stages in which people can form and disseminate self-narratives without the need to obtain anyone's approval. Accordingly, besides their motivation to earn income, tourism microentrepreneurs are often motivated by an eagerness to speak their truths. Evidence for this proposition is growing. For example, based on research in under-resourced rural communities in the US, Guatemala, and Portugal, Morais et al. (2014) reported that tourism microentrepreneurs strive to earn supplemental income to improve the resilience of their livelihoods. Yet these rural tourism microentrepreneurs also manifested strong non-economic

motivations to pass on knowledge about their local region, share disappearing traditional skills, and transmit their personal life stories. Wang and Morais (2014) reported how the Mosuo minority people from China use tourism web promotions and cultural experiences for visitors in their village to resist government-sanctioned narratives about their matriarchal culture and replace them with narratives that they deem more correct and dignifying. Nazariadli et al. (2019) assisted North Carolinian rural tourism microentrepreneurs in identifying images for promotions that would represent them in an appreciative manner that resisted the derogatory stereotypes of rural people seen in popular media. Additional insight into rural population was reported by Peroff (2016), who noted that farmers involved in tourism were highly motivated to improve their visitors' agricultural literacy.

Impact of Tourism Microentrepreneurship on Destination Communities

Host community involvement in tourism microentrepreneurship is frequently identified as a suitable strategy to temper the industry's tendency to focus on maximizing economic profit and externalizing negative social and environmental impacts (Ateljevic, 2009; Ditta-Apichai et al., 2020; Kokkranikal & Morrison, 2002; Mao, 2014; Morais et al., 2012; Payton et al., 2015). Tourism microentrepreneurship is often proposed as a key strategy to ensure that host communities earn their fair share of economic benefits from tourism development (Morais et al., 2012). Since tourism microentrepreneurs can use traditional culture and local knowledge to make their small businesses complementary to services provided by formal sector companies, the integration of microentrepreneurship into tourism systems can ultimately help destinations be more resilient to fluctuations of tourism markets (Adams & Sandarupa, 2018; Wang & Morais, 2014). Accordingly, tourism microentrepreneurs can use and repurpose resources outside of the reach of formal sector companies to create more unique and authentic experiences that, if integrated appropriately by the formal tourism system, can make the destination more competitive (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Kokkranikal & Morrison, 2002; Yachin & Ioannides, 2020). Tourism

microentrepreneurship not only allows local people to have personal interactions with tourists, but also provides them an opportunity to closely observe the tourism industry. As a result, microentrepreneurs are privy to a deeper understanding of the tourism system than other tourism workers, which can lead to greater sociocultural benefits. Under favorable conditions, tourism microentrepreneurs can become valuable tax-generating stakeholders and participants in destination governance.

Researchers have examined the conditions under which tourism microentrepreneurship is likely to produce desired local socioeconomic as well as environmental benefits (e.g., Ferreira et al., 2018, 2020; LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, & Wallace, 2016; LaPan, Morais, Wallace, & Barbieri, 2016; KC et al., 2018, 2019; Mao, 2014; Morais et al., 2015, 2018; Szabo, 2016). At a macrolevel, Mao (2014) identified geographic areas in the Southeastern US where clusters of tourism companies, microenterprises, and heritage resources were associated with improved socioeconomic indicators, including reduced poverty and improved education levels and health measures. At the community level, Nyaupane and Poudel (2011) reported that microentrepreneurs involved in ecotourism in communities next to a Nepalese national park achieved improved livelihoods and natural resource management because of their microentrepreneurial activity. In a context of a community-based homestay focused on ecotourism in Bardia National Park (Nepal), KC (2021) also reported that residents' involvement in operating homestays received socioeconomic and environmental benefits such as support for education, increased income, women's empowerment, and support for wildlife conservation. However, residents also voiced a lack of support from the government and other formal entities, which further suggests that microentrepreneurs need assistance to become integrated into the formal tourism system.

Morais et al. (2015) found additional evidence of improved outcomes when tourism microentrepreneurship is supported by international conservation organizations and national government organizations in an institutionalized manner. Their research in the natural resource-rich area of Namibia's Okavango Delta noted that the involvement of indigenous communities in communitarian wildlife tourism microentrepreneurship generated

a complex set of positive socioeconomic impacts, including the purchase of a four-wheel drive vehicle to transport sick people to the nearest health center, supplemental stipends for local grade school teachers, and the funding of home repairs. Additionally, indigenous communities involved in wildlife tourism microentrepreneurship showed an increased appreciation of wildlife and were more favorable towards conservation efforts (Morais et al., 2015). Conservation behaviors also became socially desirable due to the community benefits generated by tourism and because people were able to showcase and celebrate their traditional ecological knowledge with visitors.

Research suggests that women are generally the most vulnerable group in underresourced communities, hence the challenges and benefits of their involvement in tourism microentrepreneurship require further investigation. Wilkinson and Pratiwi (1995) pointed out that the informal sector has less entry barriers for women than formal tourism businesses. Yet women report challenges to this type of unstable work, often turning to it out of necessity rather than choice (Karides, 2005; Moodie, 2013). Nonetheless, LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, and Wallace (2016) reported that indigenous women in Guatemala experienced meaningful improvements in their livelihoods from their involvement in tourism microentrepreneurship, particularly when local government and nonprofit organizations supported them with microcredit and training and they took an active role in cooperative organizations. Specifically, cooperative tourism microentrepreneurship can afford vulnerable community members (i.e., women) a higher level of self-determination or control over their own life (LaPan, Morais, Wallace, & Barbieri, 2016). KC (2021) found that Nepalese women homestay owners offering ecotourism services to tourists experienced positive benefits, such as a sense of independence and empowerment, due to their increased stake in income-generating activities and decision-making processes. However, the benefits of homestay tourism were not captured equally by women homestay microentrepreneurs due to cultural norms that considered only some types of tourists suitable to enter their homes, effectively reducing the number of tourists they could host. Other research has shown that while participation in tourism microentrepreneurship

can challenge longstanding cultural norms, it can sometimes strain social relationships, particularly during times of change (LaPan, Morais, Wallace, & Barbieri, 2016). Norms can restabilize in a way that is tolerated by the host community and still allows women to benefit. Overall, studies suggest that tourism microentrepreneurship allows indigenous women to improve their income independence, business skills, and language skills, and that they can leverage those gains to benefit the well-being of their families and their communities (KC, 2021; LaPan, Morais, Wallace, & Barbieri, 2016; Morais et al., 2005; Usher & Morais, 2010; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995).

Integrating Tourism Microentrepreneurship in Destination Stewardship

Tourism microenterprises often emerge in response to perceived or real regulatory barriers in the formal tourism sector. Destinations have had mixed results tempering the growth of tourism-based sharing economy platforms with punitive legislative measures like temporary bans, special new taxes, and visitor fees. Moreover, the supply of experiences through web marketplaces may foster the involvement of hyperconnected members of destination communities and further alienate less connected groups from processes of place-making (Mueller & Schade, 2012) and from opportunities to tap into tourism for improving their livelihoods. Therefore, web platforms bring both new opportunities and challenges for destinations to engage with their communities to develop a shared vision for their brand or identity. Accordingly, researchers must continue to mobilize to explore ways to nurture and integrate tourism microentrepreneurship so that this emerging force can be harnessed for the competitiveness of destinations and the maximization of local benefits.

For example, the concept of slow tourism (Fulgagar et al., 2012) suggests that traveling at a slower pace, spending more time at the destination(s), and exploring the uniqueness of the place and people more in-depth, is key to a more fulfilling and enriching tourist experience. This contrasts with the ephemeral, passive, and conventional sight-seeing activities generally available through mass tourism, and it opens the door for microentrepreneurs

to provide creative tourism workshops, where tourists can express their creative selves immersed in the local culture and traditions (Matetskaya et al., 2019). Importantly, it is unlikely that the formal industry would move into these niches, as such activities fall largely outside its core competencies. Still, some researchers advocate for the symbiosis between the formal and informal sectors, as they tend to complement one another under the right conditions. Accordingly, permatourism (Ferreira & Brothers, 2022; Ferreira, Morais, Brothers, et al., 2021) has emerged as a holistic framework for tourism development and management combining top-down and bottom-up approaches to enhance destination equity and competitiveness. At the crux of this model are symbiotic relationships between formal and informal players in the tourism business ecosystem, which should be developed and nurtured by destination management organizations as part of their destination stewardship mandate.

These recent calls for the integration between formal and informal actors have been facilitated by technology adoption on both the demand and supply sides. These technological innovations have catalyzed tourism microentrepreneurship and enabled people from destination communities to earn some income from tourism systems that tended to horde all economic benefits. However, evidence related to undesired consequences for host communities of the unbridled sharing economy is beginning to emerge. Evidence indicates that a select few web platforms (e.g., TripAdvisor) influence tourists' travel behaviors (David-Negre et al., 2018), fuel price shopping, and lead to the rapid drift of popular destinations towards overtourism (Dodds & Butler, 2019). The underregulated proliferation of short-term home rentals has gentrified historic centers in popular destinations and the consolidation of real estate ownership by large agencies that substitute residential rentals for tourism rentals has also displaced and angered locals (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020; Park & Agrusa, 2020; Yrigoy, 2016).

While emerging technology has caused disruptions that allow opportunities for new microentrepreneurs to become involved in the tourism marketplace, the stabilization that follows still generally excludes the most marginalized individuals. However, the pandemic-induced economic super shock may have in fact turned the tables in favor

of community-based microhoteliers (Dolnicar & Zare, 2020). In face of the 96% drop in Airbnb bookings due to travel restrictions and sanitary measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, capitalist hosts are now wary of the risk of probable future economic shocks and likely to withdraw from the short-term rental accommodation (STRA) market and reenter the lower risk long-term rental accommodation market. With a limited supply of properties and a rising demand for the once-popular STRA product in the next few years, noncapitalist hosts will likely have the opportunity to secure more bookings at a higher rate and offer local experiences as an add-on. The importance of higher returns for microhoteliers is even greater in the likely scenario of a postpandemic recession, wherein STRA microentrepreneurship can be a lifeline for individuals in face of widespread unemployment and at risk of eviction or foreclosure.

Microentrepreneurial Development

Tourism microentrepreneurship presents low legal and administrative entry barriers, which makes this kind of activity appealing to individuals somewhat distanced from centers of cultural, political, and economic power (Wang & Morais, 2014). Furthermore, microentrepreneurs can make the most of traditional local knowledge and resources that are not useful in the formal sector employment and business systems (Yachin & Ioannides, 2020), but can represent value to tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences, hidden local places, and genuine encounters with locals. In nature-based tourism, for example, microentrepreneurs can share extant traditional knowledge about local wildlife and flora with visitors, allowing locals to benefit more from conservation (Morais et al., 2015, 2018). Within cultural tourism, local knowledge can help microentrepreneurs develop products and management processes that are appealing to both foreign visitors and locals, develop more circular supply chains and employment, and build a more successful and resilient business model (Adams & Sandarupa, 2018).

Research has shown that experience and training based on traditional entrepreneurship theory are not predictors of success for small and micro-sized tourism businesses (Hallak et al., 2011). Accordingly, researchers have started to examine

ways to conceptualize the competencies of tourism microentrepreneurs (Ferreira et al., 2018), and they have found that the agencies charged with mentoring microentrepreneurs are not entirely prepared to do so effectively (Ferreira et al., 2020). For example, microentrepreneurs appear to be effective in developing innovative products and business models, as well as running their ventures in harmony with their values and desired lifestyle. On the other hand, they tend to be less efficacious in marshaling resources (e.g., securing loans, applying for grants) and adapting to externalities (e.g., understand liability, obtaining appropriate insurance coverage). While NGOs can help greatly with the former, many are just as ill-informed as the microentrepreneurs themselves. Interestingly, this lack of knowledge on legal issues does not appear to preclude microentrepreneurs from starting their tourism ventures, although it can lead to business failure and financial problems down the road (Mohammad, 2021).

Although microentrepreneurs are finding increased demand for their authentic services and experiences in web platforms, they still need to build unique value propositions over formal sector competitors that have more resources and established ties with other companies and destination management organizations. Therefore, additional research on nascent microentrepreneurs is essential so that training and mentoring programs can be developed to meet their particular needs. Entrepreneurship curricula continue to be inexplicably rare in tourism education at the college level, even though students are growing increasingly frustrated with prospects of rather unsatisfying and precarious job opportunities awaiting them in the hospitality industry (Ezeuduji et al., 2017). We contend that universities should evolve from their vocational school orientation and embrace more entrepreneurial-focused tourism education; however, we do not yet have strong evidence about how such programs should be designed. For example, Ferreira et al. (2019) reported only modest results on a quasiexperiment with American sophomore students exposed to entrepreneur models and entrepreneurship content during a semester.

It is well established that tourism microentrepreneurs usually operate in resource-constrained environments and often have to make do with very

little to stay afloat, a process elsewhere described as bricolage entrepreneurship (Yachin & Ioannides, 2020). Thus, bridging ties are paramount for microentrepreneurs in the permatourism model, for they represent the symbiotic relationships with stakeholders across different zones of the tourism business ecosystem through which they access heterogeneous resources (Ferreira, Morais, Brothers, et al., 2021). The importance of bridging ties between microentrepreneurs and the formal private and public sector was tested empirically in the context of farm tourism microentrepreneurship, where higher bridging social capital equated to higher entrepreneurial intention to start a new business or add value to an existing one (Ferreira, Morais, Jakes, et al., 2021).

Self-efficacy is an important mechanism in human agency, accounting for such diverse phenomena as “changes in coping behavior produced by different modes of influence, level of physiological stress reactions, self-regulation of refractory behavior, resignation and despondency to failure experiences, self-debilitating effects of proxy control and illusory inefficaciousness, achievement strivings, growth of intrinsic interest, and career pursuits” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Bandura (1984) also suggested that experiences of situation-specific personal mastery that contribute to efficacy expectancies may generalize to actions beyond the specific target behavior, to which he called the “generative capability” of self-efficacy. Hence, it is plausible that enactive mastery experiences and positive feedback derived from low-entry barrier tourism microentrepreneurial activity (e.g., cash in hand, desired lifestyle, peer recognition, tourist appreciation) may contribute to an elevated perception of general self-efficacy, which may cut across different areas of individuals’ livelihoods. Therefore, we postulate that success in tourism microentrepreneurship might embolden individuals to seek other livelihood opportunities and to become more proactively engaged with the community, and society in general.

Special Section Articles

This article serves as an introduction to a Special Section on Tourism Microentrepreneurship. The first article in this section, “Tourism

Microentrepreneurship and Land Stewardship in a Tz'utujil Mayan Coffee Community," examines how tourism microentrepreneurship as a livelihood diversification mechanism influences environmental behaviors among Mayan coffee farmers in Guatemala. This study argues that working in cooperatives as a form of communitarian approach facilitates farmers' efforts to earn supplemental income while it also fosters land stewardship. The authors also pointed out the lack of government support for sustainable farming and the need for awareness and training programs to build resilient Mayan communities.

The second article, "Microentrepreneurship in Himalayan Region: Drafting Heritage Sustainance Through Stakeholder Perception," delves into stakeholders' perceptions regarding tourism microentrepreneurship as a tool to conserve cultural, natural, and built heritage in the Himalayan region of Himachal Pradesh, India. The study finds that tourism microentrepreneurship practices are not reflective of sustainability. Some major constraints were the lack of ecofriendly practices and the government's failure to involve locals in the decision-making process and ensuring a supportive entrepreneurial environment. The study recommends that the proper guidelines and considerations are required from the government authorities to facilitate microentrepreneurial ventures within a sustainability framework (e.g., three pillars of sustainable tourism: economic, socioculture, and environment).

Taken together, these empirical studies support previous research outlined in this article suggesting that tourism microentrepreneurship supports a number of positive environmental (e.g., land stewardship) and economic (e.g., livelihood improvement) outcomes, but can also fall short of achieving true sustainability. They also reinforce the key point that destination stakeholders, particularly local and national governments, need to do more to support tourism microentrepreneurs and recognize the value they add.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

While substantial research on tourism microentrepreneurship is emerging, there remain many gaps and questions still to be answered. Evidence

suggests that collaboration, either through formal communitarian structures or informal bridging ties, improves outcomes for tourism microentrepreneurs. Yet replicable studies across destinations and sociocultural structures are needed and should explore microentrepreneurial opportunities, motivations, and challenges. The distinctive features of different destinations have led to a predominance of individual and community-based case studies in the tourism microentrepreneurship literature. While this research tends to provide in-depth insights, it also limits generalizability. Therefore, future research should explore research designs that cut across geographical and sociocultural contexts to provide generalizable insights into the factors that influence the impacts generated by tourism microentrepreneurship.

Research should also examine which characteristics constitute a supportive environment to microentrepreneurial engagement. Considering the vulnerability of the tourism industry to crises, studies should explore reluctance among populations to microentrepreneurial engagement and should look at differences in motivation, particularly between individual microentrepreneurs operating independently, through a web-based platform, and those in more collaborative contexts facilitated by the government or NGOs. In some destinations, tourism microentrepreneurship seems to be associated with increased competitiveness and equity, while in other destinations it is associated with overtourism and worsening of residents' well-being. Future research is needed to untangle the determining factors for these contrasting findings.

Tourism microentrepreneurship has been argued to offer tourism products and services that positively contribute to sustainable tourism pillars, particularly in fostering sociocultural and environmental benefits besides merely an economic benefit. As the sustainability movement and debate continues to evolve, understanding motivations from tourism microentrepreneurs to offer sustainable tourism products and services, or the perceived importance and value of tourism sustainability will be essential. With fewer entry barriers than the formal tourism sector, tourism microentrepreneurship is particularly suitable to underresourced populations. Therefore, research in this area should consider methodologies that account for the unique

challenges and ethical considerations involved with working with vulnerable populations (Morais et al., 2017), particularly when considering the three sustainability pillars. Research should consider the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and sustainable tourism frameworks to help build a holistic understanding of the impacts of tourism microentrepreneurship (KC et al., 2021; Shereni, 2019; World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017).

Given that cultural, economic, and environmental change usually occurs over time, it would be valuable to see longitudinal research on the impacts of tourism microentrepreneurship in given destinations. Longitudinal research can be difficult to pursue because it requires long-term engagement with the study population, which can be costly and can detract from the short-term productivity metrics of researchers. Therefore, researchers should be incentivized to become involved long term with destinations, collecting data periodically from tourism microentrepreneurs over time to produce high-inference longitudinal studies.

Tourism microentrepreneurship provides authentic tourism experiences, yet there is a lack of research examining tourists' satisfaction and loyalty to tourism microentrepreneurs and their products and services. Understanding tourists' perspectives can assist tourism microentrepreneurs to make informed decisions about their microentrepreneurial functions. Considering the growing role of tourism microentrepreneurs in destinations, future research about their customers is needed to help them be more successful and help destinations be more competitive. Microentrepreneurship can purportedly make destinations competitive when integrated synergistically with formal sector actors. Future research should also examine best practices in fostering and catalyzing these kinds of formal-informal partnerships. Destination marketing organizations strive to provide competitive tourism products and services. Their respective policies and efforts to integrate tourism microentrepreneurship into destination development and marketing would play a significant role for this niche market to flourish. Further investigation into this cross-section is recommended.

Entrepreneurship development programs and services based on traditional entrepreneurship theoretical

frameworks are likely ineffective in enabling the success of tourism microentrepreneurs because research suggests that this population is markedly different. Therefore, more research should examine the specific needs of tourism microentrepreneurs as well as the extent to which microentrepreneurs can obtain competent advice and resources from support agencies. Additionally, reciprocal determinism within the broad conceptual framework of self-efficacy should be used to study how tourism microentrepreneurs' successful experiences in underregulated environments may spur formal business endeavors.

The changing life goals of rising adults and the increasing awareness of the negative track records of formal tourism and the hospitality industry are diverting college students from corporate career paths and into startups and sociopreneurship. Therefore, researchers need to explore students' changing life and career goals as well as the effectiveness of extracurricular and cocurricular microentrepreneurial mentoring programs in secondary and postsecondary schools.

Conclusion

Tourism microentrepreneurship is increasingly becoming a popular phenomenon in rapidly growing economies around the world. This is further advanced by web-based platforms that democratize the process of tourism microentrepreneurship. Meanwhile, destination competitiveness is supported by a range of tourism products and services offered by tourism microentrepreneurs. Even though tourism microentrepreneurship is a promising sector within the tourism industry to foster tourism sustainability, microentrepreneurship literature is scarce. The existing void in microentrepreneurship literature is echoed by many researchers. Most academics continue to be disengaged and unprepared to conduct scholarship seeking to understand this informal sector of the tourism system; destination management practitioners are largely at a loss on how to interact with the sector. As such, tourism microentrepreneurship promotion at destinations goes unaddressed from the perspective of policymaking and planning.

However, there is a growing interest among practitioners and academics and an expanding body of knowledge exploring various aspects of tourism

microentrepreneurship, and there are notable successful cases illustrating best practices about how destinations and private companies should catalyze tourism microentrepreneurship for increased destination competitiveness and equity. Yet many areas of tourism microentrepreneurship remain unexplored including the models of tourism microentrepreneurship, microentrepreneurs' motivations, the impact of microentrepreneurship on destination communities, its role in destination stewardship, and the development of microentrepreneurship in technical and postsecondary programs. This article highlights the juxtaposition of the growing importance of tourism microentrepreneurship as well as the infancy of its exploration in tourism scholarship as an effort to inform and stimulate several investigative directions for the next wave of sustainable tourism research.

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